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ABSTRACT

The results of a recent Harris poll, as reported by the Director of Research for the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB), suggest that the way people use television has changed: people who watch tend to do other things while watching. While this may be true of commercial television, the same poll indicated that viewers of public broadcasting programs pay more attention and are more involved in the programs. The CPB suggests that this is because the plots of many commercial television programs tend to be very predictable, while those of public broadcasting programs are not. Other polls reported by the Corporation indicate that since 1965, there has been a 23 percent increase in audience size for public broadcasting, with 38 percent of households interviewed having watched a public television station in the last week. A dramatic increase in public television viewing was found for minority groups--this is probably due to the fact that "Sesame Street" is beginning to penetrate into these households. Additional findings were that median hours watched per week increased from 1.5 to 1.9 percent, that public television viewers are more selective in their viewing, and that public television is seen as less biased than commercial stations. (SH)

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Public Television: How Our Users See Us

October 18, 1971

Leroy Miller - Director of Research, CPB

FOR THE PAST THREE YEARS THE CORPORATION HAS TAKEN THIS FORUM TO TALK A LITTLE BIT ABOUT RESEARCH EFFORTS OF THE CORPORATION OVER THE PAST YEAR, BUT BEFORE WE TALK ABOUT NUMBERS, I SHOULD LIKE TO REFRESH OUR RECOLLECTION ABOUT OUR PERCEPTIONS OF AUDIENCE. AS WE HAVE SAID SO MANY TIMES IN THE PAST, WE ARE NOT MERELY IN THE AUDIENCE DELIVERING BUSINESS. AS WE TALK ABOUT AUDIENCE WE ARE MORE CONCERNED WITH THE EFFECT, THE IMPACT, AND THE PENETRATION THAT OUR PROGRAMMING HAS ON VIEWERS AND WE SEEK TO INVOLVE OUR VIEWERS IN OUR PROGRAMS. I LIKE TO CHARACTERIZE OUR PROGRAMMING EFFORTS AS ADOPTING THE RIFLE APPROACH. IT CONCERNS

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ITSELF WITH SPECIFIC TASTES AND INTERESTS OF ITS VIEWERS. IT DOES NOT SEEK IN ANY HOUR TO ATTRACT ALL OF THE POSSIBLE VIEWERS IN THE SIGNAL AREA, BUT RATHER TO PROVIDE HIGH QUALITY AND CREATIVE PROGRAMMING FOR SPECIAL TASTES AND INTERESTS. WHILE A GIVEN VIEWER'S TASTES AND INTERESTS MIGHT NOT BE SERVED ON SUNDAY NIGHT FROM 9 - 10 PM, HE MIGHT CHECK US OUT AGAIN ON TUESDAY NIGHT FROM 8 - 9 PM AND FIND SOMETHING THAT SUITES HIS TASTES AND INTERESTS.

FOR SOME TIME WE HAVE SUSPECTED THAT THE AVERAGE TELEVISION VIEWER IS USING TELEVISION IN A WAY DIFFERENTLY FROM THE WAY HE DID IN THE PAST. WHEN THE TELEVISION SET FIRST COMES INTO THE HOUSE THE TELEVISION

SET CONTROLS THE HOUSEHOLD. AFTER THE INITIAL REALIZATION THAT A PICTURE AND SOUND COME OUT OF THE BOX, THE HOUSEHOLD MEMBERS THEN BEGIN TO ASK "SO WHAT ELSE IS NEW?" SINCE THEY HAVE ACCEPTED THE FACT THAT THIS IS WHAT A TELEVISION SET CAN DO THEN THEY START TO SELECT FROM ANY OF THE VARIOUS CHOICES BEING OFFERED. AFTER A WHILE, THE HOUSEHOLD HAS PRETTY MUCH FIGURED OUT HOW MAT AND KITTY ON GUNSMOKE ARE GOING TO REACT IN A GIVEN SITUATION, ~~SO WHEN THEY DO IT~~, THEY WATCH WITH A REASONABLE DEGREE OF ATTENTIVENESS FOR THE FIRST 3 or 4 MINUTES TO GET SOME IDEA OF WHAT THE CONFLICT IS GOING TO BE THAT NIGHT, AND MAYBE ANOTHER 8 to 10 MINUTES LATER IN THE PROGRAM, THEY CHECK TO SEE WHAT, IF ANY, changes ~~EVENTS~~ IN THE PLOT, AND THEN MAYBE ANOTHER

10 to 15 MINUTES LATER THEY CHECK IT AGAIN TO SEE HOW THE PROBLEM IS GOING TO BE RESOLVED AND THEN ABOUT 4 MINUTES BEFORE THE SHOW IS ENDED THEY WILL LOOK AGAIN TO SEE HOW THE PROBLEM IS DEALT WITH.

THESE CHANGES IN THE WAY PEOPLE USE TELEVISION ARE A FUNCTION OF THE PREDICTABILITY OF IT. HOWEVER, WITH PUBLIC BROADCASTING WHEN VIEWERS ARE WATCHING , LET'S SAY "JULIA CHILDS" SHOWING YOU HOW TO PREPARE COQ-AU-VIN, IF YOU TURN YOUR HEAD AWAY FROM THE SET YOU MAY MISS HOW MUCH WINE TO PUT INTO IT, HOW FREQUENTLY TO STIR IT, OR EVEN HOW LONG TO COOK IT, SO THAT WHEN THE VIEWER WATCHES PUBLIC TELEVISION HE BECOMES INVOLVED IN THE PROGRAM. A VIEWER CAN NEVER PREDICT HOW AN ENCOUNTER ON "FIRING LINE" WILL BE

RESOLVED OR WHAT "BIG BIRD" WILL DO NEXT, OR GET HIMSELF A GLASS OF WINE IN THE MIDDLE OF "NET PLAYHOUSE".

IN THE HARRIS SURVEY CONDUCTED DURING THE FIRST WEEK OF OCTOBER WE ASKED THE 2031 RESPONDENTS WHAT THEY DID WHEN THEY WATCH TELEVISION. WHEN WATCHING COMMERCIAL TELEVISION A LITTLE LESS THAN 6 OUT OF EVERY 10 EITHER OFTEN OR SOMETIMES LEAVES THE TELEVISION SET ON EVEN THOUGH THEY ARE OUT OF THE ROOM. HOWEVER, ONLY A LITTLE OVER A THIRD OF PUBLIC TELEVISION VIEWERS DO THAT. PUBLIC TELEVISION VIEWERS ARE LEAST LIKELY (26-35%) TO WATCH TV WITHOUT INTERRUPTION FOR AN ENTIRE EVENING - OR READ A MAGAZINE WHILE VIEWING (23-35%). A LITTLE LESS THAN A THIRD THINK THEY ARE WASTING TOO MUCH TIME

WHEN THEY ARE WATCHING COMMERCIAL TELEVISION AS CONTRASTED WITH ONLY 14 PERCENT OF THE PUBLIC TELEVISION VIEWERS FEELING THAT WAY. WHEN ASKED IF THEY REALLY GET ABSORBED IN THE PROGRAMS COMMERCIAL TELEVISION VIEWERS INDICATE (71%) THAT THEY OFTEN OR SOMETIMES GET REALLY ABSORBED IN THE PROGRAM, BUT ONLY 66 PERCENT OF PUBLIC TELEVISION VIEWERS RESPOND THAT WAY.

I THINK THAT IT IS IMPORTANT TO KEEP THIS FRAME OF REFERENCE IN MIND WHEN TALKING ABOUT AUDIENCE.

IN STATING THIS PREMISE FIRST, THIS IS NOT TO SUGGEST THAT THE TWO MEASURES WE USED LAST YEAR DO NOT INDICATE THAT OUR AUDIENCE IS UP, INDEED IN 25 MARKETS MEASURED FOR

THE CORPORATION BY THE AMERICAN RESEARCH BUREAU OUR AUDIENCE HAS GONE UP FROM 1970 to 1971 BY 11 PERCENT. AND, IN 19 MARKETS WHERE WE HAVE COMPARABLE DATA GOING BACK TO 1965 OUR AUDIENCE HAS INCREASED BY 23 PERCENT. LAST YEAR THE HARRIS STUDY INDICATED THAT 32 PERCENT OF THE HOUSEHOLDS HE VISITED WATCHED A PUBLIC TELEVISION STATION IN THE PREVIOUS WEEK. THIS YEAR THAT FIGURE HAS INCREASED TO 38 PERCENT. NOT ONLY THAT, IN 1970 NINETEEN PERCENT STATED THAT THEY WATCHED A PUBLIC TELEVISION STATION WITHOUT ANY AID FROM THE INTERVIEWER, BUT THIS YEAR THAT FIGURE GOES UP TO 28 PERCENT. THIS INDICATES NOT ONLY A HIGHER LEVEL OF VIEWING BUT A MORE SOLID IMPRESSION IN THE MINDS OF OUR VIEWERS. WHEN WE LOOK AT THE DEMOGRAPHICS

THE MOST DRAMATIC SHIFT OCCURS IN THE VIEWING OF BLACKS. IN 1970 THIRTY-FIVE PERCENT OF THE BLACK HOUSEHOLDS HAD WATCHED THEIR LOCAL PUBLIC TELEVISION STATION. THIS YEAR THAT FIGURE INCREASED TO 52 PERCENT. WHEN WE THINK ABOUT OUR NATIONAL PROGRAMMING FOR BLACKS AS BETWEEN 1970 AND 1971 THERE WAS NO CHANGE IN THE NUMBER OF PROGRAM OFFERINGS FOR THAT COMMUNITY SO I SUSPECT THE INCREASE IN THE LEVEL OF VIEWING IS PROBABLY DUE TO THE FACT THAT "SESAME STREET" IS BEGINNING TO MAKE A SIGNIFICANT PENETRATION IN BLACK HOUSEHOLDS. IN A STUDY CONDUCTED IN EIGHT OF THE LARGEST CITIES AMONG A SAMPLE OF 2400 BLACKS, WHEN WE ASKED RESPONDENTS WHO HAD CHILDREN SIX OR UNDER WHICH PROGRAM

THEIR CHILDREN WATCHED 47 PERCENT OF THEM NAMES "SESAME STREET". THE NEXT PROGRAM MENTIONED RECEIVED A RESPONSE RATE FROM 10 PERCENT OF THE HOUSEHOLDS. PARALLELING THAT EFFORT WE CONDUCTED A STUDY AMONG 1400 SPANISH SPEAKING RESPONDENTS IN EASH HARLEM AND THE SOUTH BRONX IN NEW YORK, WHICH ARE PREDOMINANTLY SPANISH SPEAKING COMMUNITIES, SOME 54 PERCENT OF THESE HOUSEHOLDS RECALLED "SESAME STREET" AS THE PROGRAM THEIR CHILDREN WATCHED ON THEIR LOCAL PUBLIC TELEVISION STATION. BUT THEY WERE SUBSEQUENTLY ASKED IF THEIR CHILDREN WATCHED "SESAME STREET" 96 PERCENT OF THESE HOUSEHOLDS INDICATED THAT THEY DO.

LAST YEAR SOME 37 PERCENT OF OUR VIEWERS

WATCHED US LESS THAN ONE HOUR A WEEK. THIS YEAR THAT FIGURE GOES DOWN TO 30 PERCENT, SO, NOT ONLY ARE MORE PEOPLE WATCHING US BUT THEY ARE ALSO WATCHING US MORE FREQUENTLY. THE MEDIAN HOURS INCREASED FROM 1.5 to 1.9 PERCENT WITH THE MOST DRAMATIC INCREASES OCCURING AMONG BLACKS, WHO VIEW MORE PUBLIC TELEVISION THAN ANY OTHER GROUP. ANOTHER INDICATION OF THE SELECTIVITY OF PUBLIC TELEVISION VIEWERS, MORESO THAN ANY OTHER GROUP (37%), ALMOST ALL OF THE TIME BEFORE THEY WATCH TELEVISION THEY LOOK IN THE NEWSPAPER TO SEE WHAT IS ON, AND ALMOST 9 PERCENT OF THEM SAY THAT ALMOST ALL OF THE TIME THEY SELECT THEIR PROGRAMS BY FLIPPING FROM CHANNEL TO CHANNEL.

WE ALSO ASKED THESE RESPONDENTS TO COMPARE PUBLIC TELEVISION AND COMMERCIAL TELEVISION AS TO WHETHER IT OFTEN PRESENTS A BIASED POINT OF VIEW. YOUR STATIONS ARE SEEN AS LESS BIASED (16%) THAN THE COMMERCIAL STATION WHERE 42 PERCENT FEEL THAT IT IS TRUE THAT THE COMMERCIAL STATIONS OFTEN PRESENT A BIASED POINT OF VIEW. WHEN ASKED TO RATE PUBLIC TELEVISION AS TO THE QUALITY OF THE JOB THEY ARE DOING IN PRESENTING FAIR AND UNBIASED DOCUMENTARIES (43%) SAY THAT THEIR LOCAL PUBLIC TELEVISION STATION IS DOING AN EXCELLENT OR PRETTY GOOD JOB, WITH 37 PERCENT FEELING THAT ABOUT THEIR LOCAL COMMERCIAL STATION. OF THE TOTAL SAMPLE ONLY 7 PERCENT FEELS THAT THEIR LOCAL PUBLIC TELEVISION STATION TENDS TO

TO FAVOR A CERTAIN POLITICAL POINT OF VIEW WITH 35 PERCENT SAY IT PRESENTS ALL POINTS OF VIEW. A LITTLE MORE THAN ONE OUT OF EVERY TWO FEELS THAT TELEVISION IN GENERAL GIVES THEM ENOUGH OF A CHOICE AND VARIETY OF DIFFERENT THINGS TO WATCH, 48 PERCENT OF THE PUBLIC TELEVISION VIEWERS FEEL THAT THEIR LOCAL PTV STATION PROVIDES THEM WITH SUFFICIENT CHOICES.

47 PERCENT OF THESE RESPONDENTS FEEL THAT THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT HAS EITHER A GREAT DEAL OR SOME CONTROL OVER WHAT IS SHOWN ON PUBLIC TELEVISION BECAUSE OF THE FINANCIAL SUPPORT PROVIDED BY THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT.

DETAILED COPIES OF THE HARRIS 1971 REPORT AND THE ARB 1971 FINDINGS WILL BE

FORWARDED TO EACH STATION MANAGER SOMETIME WITHIN THE NEXT TWO OR THREE WEEKS. WHILE OUR FOCUS IN THESE REPORTS HAS BEEN ON NATIONAL PROGRAMMING IF YOU FEEL WE MAY BE ABLE TO ASSIST YOU IN ANY LOCAL RESEARCH YOU MIGHT UNDERTAKE WE WOULD BE PLEASED TO RESPOND TO ANY REASONABLE REQUESTS YOU MAY HAVE.

MUCHAS GRACIAS.....